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Perth Amboy's input sought

on Ford Ave. redevelopment

By Lynn K. Barra

Staff Writer

MILLTOWN — The Ford Avenue Redevelopment Agency is scheduled to hear a presentation from Perth Amboy Mayor Joseph Vas at a meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. Feb. 12 at borough hall.

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The agency was formed by the Borough Council in October to promote economic revitalization at the 19.5-acre site on Ford Avenue where the Michelin Tire Co. built its first North American factory in 1843.

Seven members of the community, including Mayor Gloria Bradford and Councilman Gerard Cappella, were appointed to the agency, which held its first meeting in November.

"We invited Mayor Vas to get a better understanding of the timeline to develop a site like ours," agency Vice Chairman Anthony Zarillo said of the property, which is bounded by Mill Pond and Lawrence Brook to the south and west, and Main Street to the east.

Vas may bring exhibits of one of his city's more recent revitalization projects, the Landings at Harborside, a \$600 million project along the northeast shoreline near the Arthur Kill. A private developer will be constructing the site, which is zoned for residential, retail and commercial uses.

"We're not looking to replicate what the mayor did in his town," Zarillo said. "He's gone through a major redevelopment process. Some of the agency members want a clearer understanding of the procedures involved in redevelopment."

Zarillo said that while the agency is still in the preliminary stages of its redevelopment plans for the site, which is currently owned by American Land Resources, Morristown, the agency is considering the construction of senior housing.

"We have a substantial senior citizen sector in the borough," Zarillo said. "I'm convinced there's a need for this kind of housing. We have none at all now."

The Milltown property is currently zoned for light industrial and commercial uses, Zarillo said, but the agency may request that the Planning Board rezone the parcel if senior housing is approved by both the agency and the Borough Council.

Any future construction ideas the redevelopment agency considers must first be approved by the council, according to Zarillo. He emphasized that because the former Michelin warehouse is a brownfields site, which is an abandoned industrial site that may include

incentives for cleanup and redevelopment, the agency will seek state and federal funding to restore some or all of the buildings, if possible.

"I envision some of the original aesthetic value of the site will be maintained if it doesn't cause any safety or environmental problems," Zarillo said about the site, which he said would also be an ideal location to combine the borough's two firehouses, which are currently located on opposite sides of the borough.

"We're looking at two areas seriously," Zarillo said. "One would be a senior citizen project, which as a benchmark might be 100 units, plus or minus 25 percent. Another area we're looking at is the firehouse situation. We have two locations [for the firehouses]. We want to consolidate them into one."

Zarillo said the agency welcomes public input on the Ford Avenue site and encourages residents to attend the meetings.

"Before we put into the public's mind that we're putting buildings in the ground, we need to go through a number of steps," Zarillo said. "We're not going to wake up one morning and see a new Ford Avenue developed from the ruins of the old factory. This is going to take some time."